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## WOMEN OF THE SOUTH.\*

ERY happy has the author of this book been in the choice of a title; the name is redolent of pleasant associations. To be introduced to Southern homes and firesides is always delightful, for there hospitality and grace assume their most winning guise; but, to be introduced to those firesides where beauty and genius have their especial place, is to take us captive indeed. Not that all women of genius are beautiful, but that these "Women of the South" are peculiarly endowed—being, almost without exception, as captivating in the graces of person as of mind; and the author of the book has chosen wisely for her publishers' sake, in the adoption of the title. The publishers certainly have done well their part, for a more sumptuous volume could scarcely be demanded even by the most exacting. What with heavy and tinted paper, clear, pure typography, steel illustration, and exquisite binding, they have embalmed their subjects most fittingly.

The volume comprises biographical sketches, with extracts from their writings, of Octavia Walton Le Vert, Carolines Gilman and Howard, Anna Cora Ritchie, Catherine Anne Warfield, Eleanor Percy Lee, Maria J. McIntosh, Almira Lincoln Phelps, Marion Harland (Mrs. Terhune), Emma D. E. N. Southworth, Rosa Vertner Johnson, Caroline Lee Hentz, Sally Rochester Ford, Susan Archer Talley, Augusta J. Evans, Amelia B. Welby, L. Virginia French, Lizzie Pettit, and some eighteen or twenty others—all of good local, and many of national, reputations, as writers in prose and verse.

In the choice of her subjects the author seems to have been governed more by their local than national repute; for, it can scarcely be said that half of her list have yet won a place in our national literature, or have gained that public and general recognition which must attach to all writers who are to be regarded as denizens of our literary Valhalla. This gives to her book something of the character of pre-maturity, and will prevent it assuming the *ex-cathedra* position held by the works

of Dr. Griswold, T. Buchanan Read, and Prof. Hart.

The choice of a general title has disarmed criticism at another point. It can scarcely be said that Anna Cora Ritchie, Mrs. Hentz, Mrs. Gilman, Mrs. Phelps, are "Southern women," having all been born and educated in the North; while Miss McIntosh, and Mrs. Southworth, though Southern born, have won their reputation chiefly in the North. Still, in the author's signification, they are to be considered as Southern women "distinguished in literature," and therefore are properly embraced in the volume.

In the preparation of her work, it is evident that the author gave the mastery of her pen to the feelings rather than to the judgment. Every page teems with a loving consideration of her subject. This characterizes the record with the charm of a pleasant story. That the public will expect more may be true—that the absence of critical summary and estimate will be remarked upon is certain; but, we are not sure, for all that, that the author was bound to render her work a series of biographico-critical essays, with quotations *a-la-Poe*. The office of critic would have impelled the subjection of all things in the book to the crucible of the literary analyst and refiner—a process which would have measurably contracted the pages of the present portly volume.

The spirit in which the work is wrought is so evidently the spirit of admiration, that the several notices read like the glowing tributes of a friend. The author has simply abridged the well-known autorial dogma—*de mortuis nil nisi bonum*, and renders it *nil nisi bonum*. All of her subjects, we believe, are now living, with the exception of Mrs. Hentz; and it is because they are living and moving among us, that the personalities and familiar allusions of the author to the social and peculiar family relations of her *dramatis personæ* seem as if designed for the private letter rather than for publication. If the parties themselves do not complain the public certainly need not proscribe for them. The author will suffer most, if she cares for literary fame, in having her work treated as a series of familiar, agreeable letters about her female friends instead of having it regarded as high literary and critical authority.

The sketches of Marion Harland, Mrs. Warfield, and Miss Evans, will be perused with particular interest at this time, when

the literary world is so absorbed in their several works. Taking the "Household of Bouverie," "Beulah," and "Nemesis," into consideration, it may be doubted if three more brilliant successes have been made consecutively in the whole history of our literature. Had "Rutledge" been written by a Southern woman, the triumph of the "Palm and Magnolia female genius" would have been complete. In view of these successes, much, very much, remains for our Northern women to do, if they would preserve their autorial "balance of power." Harriet Prescott, Caroline Chesebro, Alice Cary, Mrs. Stephens, Mrs. Stowe—look to your laurels!

This volume suggests a companion volume, viz., "The Women of the North distinguished in Literature." Such a work would assume great proportions if treated in the friendly and lenient spirit of the work now under notice; for the women of the Northern States who have perpetrated books are as numerous as the fabled leaves of Vallombrosa. This fact would necessitate no little autorial discretion, and would demand the labor of the impartial critic and judge rather than that of the friend. We hope to welcome such a volume at some future time. It could not prove otherwise than a publisher's success if properly done.

The "Women of the South" is a book which particularly commends itself to the parlor and centre-table. The steel plate portraits of Madam Le Vert, Marion Harland, Miss Evans, Mrs. Johnson, Mrs. Ritchie, Miss McIntosh, Miss Virginia French, are admirably done, and form a very interesting feature of the volume.

We trust the enterprising publishers will find in the success of their beautiful volume a full compensation for the heavy outlay required in its production. Derby & Jackson have taken the initial steps, in their "Court of Napoleon," "Women of Beauty and Heroism," "Josephine Gallery," "Loyes and Heroines of the Poets," "Women of the South," &c., in forestalling expensive English works, in this market, as holiday and gift books. Our public has long enough been treated, by one of the leading houses, with re-publications of "Galleries," and "Poems," and "Annuares," from worn-out London plates; and we trust our publishers will find it for their interest to produce their best works from original, American pens and pencils.

\* WOMEN OF THE SOUTH DISTINGUISHED IN LITERATURE. By Mary Forrest. Illustrated with steel portraits. 8vo, 511 pp. New-York: Derby & Jackson.